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PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS
AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
GENEVA

STATEMENT BY
THE INDONESIAN OBSERVER DELEGATION
ON ITEM 23

Madam Chairperson,

Throughout the history of mankind, differences in religion or belief have often been the cause of tension and hostility between one group and another, and which in some cases, have even led to the tragedy of war and destruction. And this phenomena carries on to the present day as can be seen in some areas of the world. Therefore, when in 1981 the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief, Indonesia welcomed it as one more step taken towards ensuring respect for the inherent dignity and value of the human person. Preambular paragraph 4 of the Declaration states, "that religion or belief, for anyone who professes either, is one of the fundamental elements in his conception of life ...". My Delegation could not agree more with this concept for we believe that the freedom of religion is basic among human rights as it directly involves the dignity of human beings and is highly personal and private in nature. Therefore, it is imperative that in a society which consists of believers of different religions we should not only try to refrain from any attempt to impose one belief on another, but rather, we should work together towards the realization of a harmonious and tolerant society for a better understanding and cooperation among the different religions.

To guarantee that the provisions of the Declaration are fully implemented, particulary paragraph 1 of Article 2 of the Declaration which states, "no one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons, or person on the grounds of religion or other belief", this Commission, by resolution 1986/20, appointed a Special Rapporteur. It is my Delegation's view, that in carrying out his mandate, the Special Rapporteur should not confine himself merely to the shortcomings in the implementation of the Declaration in any

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particular country, but also try to identify any positive elements that may be present in the efforts to bring harmony in the inter-relationship among the various religious denominations and between religion and the State. By developing and further improving such positive elements we can safeguard equal opportunity for all religions to flourish. It is also important to take into account all aspects related to the religious life of a country, including the political, economic, social and cultural situation, as it should be borne in mind that much as religion is considered a private matter, it also plays an important role in society. The essence of this is that the enjoyment of religious freedom should be in the context of other aspects of human rights.

Madam Chairperson,

Permit me now to illustrate to this Commission Indonesia's adherence to the principles enshrined in the Declaration. As is known, Indonesia is a nation composed of hundreds of ethnic groups spread all over the archipelago, and religion and belief in God have strong roots in the history and culture of the Indonesian people. Therefore, since the birth of the Indonesian Republic, the Government of Indonesia has always guaranteed the freedom of every citizen to adhere to his or her religion. This is reflected in the State Philosophy, "Pancasila"where its very first principle is Belief in the One and only God, and in the National Constitution of 1945, Article 29 of which stipulates that :

(i) The State shall be based upon Belief in the One Supreme God;

(ii) The State shall guarantee freedom to every resident to adhere to his respective religion and to perform his religious duties in conformity with that religion and that faith.

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In implementing the above provisions, the Government of Indonesia makes every effort to protect the rights of all its citizens to practice the religion of their choice and actively encourages the promotion of religious activities. This commitment is reiterated in the current Five Year National Development Plan where the Government will continue providing aid and facilities to religious communities for the construction of religious service infrastructures, assistance to enhance religious life and will continue upgrading the houses of worship of the various religious denominations.The Plan also stresses the importance of promoting religious life and tolerance, that is, religious education which is compulsory from primary school up to university level. This is indeed, of importance since intolerance often derives from ignorance.

Madam Chairperson,

All efforts of the Government of Indonesia to guarantee the enjoyment of freedom of religion to its citizens are not only based on the belief of the concept that I have stated earlier in my intervention but also on the policy of preventing religious conflicts among different religious communities, as well as between religious communities and the Government, with the aim of developing dynamic harmony in social relationships that strengthen one another and bind together in a spirit of toleration. In fact, even although 90% of 180 million Indonesians are Moslems, we do not adopt the terms "majority" and "minority" as these words are generally understood. In our community where the spirit of deliberation and consensus is upheld, irrespective of whether we are Moslem, Hindu, Buddhist or Christian, we are first and foremost Indonesians, with the inherent right to adhere to the religion of our choice.

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In this respect, I would like to note the visit of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Indonesia in October 1989 where a dialogue was held between the leaders of the various religious faiths. Indeed, the Pope stated in his speech to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See at the Vatican on 13 January 1990 that, and I quote from the L'Osservatore Romano, no. 5, 29 January 1990: " In this regard, I was recently able to note the beneficial effects of such inter-confessional understanding in Indonesia, where the principles of "Pancasila" enable Islam and other religions practised by the inhabitants of this country to come together themselves in a harmonious dialogue which benefits the whole society", unquote.

In conclusion, Madam Chairperson, I would like to stress my Delegation's view that freedom of religion and belief is not only important for a harmonious life within a country alone but as is also stated in the Declaration, it should as well contribute to the attainment of the goals of world peace, social justice and friendship among peoples.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.